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THE NAVAL INFANTRY UNITS OF THE SOVIET FLEET (DIE MARINEINFANTE--ETC(U)
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Die Marineinfanterieverbande der Sowjetflotte

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THE NAVAL INFANTRY UNITS OF THE SOVIET FLEET

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Alongside the airborne troops of the armed forces, the Naval Infantry units are among the elite units of the Soviet Armed Forces. With their berets, black naval uniforms, and blue and white striped sailor shirts, they form a special center of attraction of all large Soviet parades. Special insignia of the Naval Infantry are the golden anchor displayed on the left sleeve of the uniform shirt and the white/blue naval battle ensign displayed on all combatants.

History

Being not at all squeamish about assuming the "pre-socialist traditions," the Soviet Naval Infantry traces its origins back to Czar Peter I, who in 1705 ordered the formation of the first naval infantry regiment. These soldiers entered their first battle during the Northern War (1700-1721). Czarist Admiral Uschakov is also reputed to be one of the fathers of the Naval Infantry; he fought during the Mediterranean expedition (1798-1800) against Napoleon I. A portion of his sailors were trained in how to seize the island fortress of Corfu. In 1812, the Czar's first naval infantry troops were dissolved. Upon commencement of the first world war, naval infantry units were again mustered for the Baltic and Black Sea Fleets, and by the war's end, they reached a strength of two divisions.

Armbadge and flag emblem of the Soviet Naval Infantry

Parading Naval Infantry at the Kremlin Wall in Moscow

Out of the naval infantrymen and sailors of the Baltic Fleet, about 10,000 rebels were recruited from Helsingfors, Wyborg, and Kronstadt. These men became the first "Red" naval infantry of the October Revolution of 1917 and occupied key objectives in Petersburg (Leningrad) and stormed the seat of Kerenski's Provisional Government, the Winter Palace. Of course, it is concealed that the

*Numbers in the right hand margin indicate pagination in the original text.

naval infantry of the Kronstadt Garrison had by March 1921 already had enough of the "accomplishments" of the revolution, and rose up against the Soviet power under the slogan, "Soviet, yes, but without communists." The Soviet authorities had the insurrection bloodily suppressed by LT Tukhachevskiy.

The insurrection may be one of the reasons why the newly formed "Red Workers and Farmers Army" did not maintain any naval infantry. It was not until 1940, on the eve of the second world war, that a naval infantry brigade was again organized for employment with the Baltic Fleet. During the war, numerous naval infantry units were formed which recruited overwhelmingly from active duty personnel and reservists from the Soviet fleet which had been deprived of its bases on the Baltic and Black Seas. Gathered into 35 brigades and dozens of battalions, they fought, among other places, on the Leningrad Front in Odessa, Sevastopol, and Stalingrad, side by side with the Army forces. In the battle of Moscow alone, 40,000 naval infantry are said to have been employed as regular infantry. According to Soviet statements, the naval infantry also made more than 100 amphibious assaults during the course of the war. The more important of these landings were made at Kertsch and other sites in the Crimea during December 1941. The objective of these landings was to divert German power away from Sevastopol. Otherwise, smaller operations that took place, involving especially the Black Sea Fleet, supported the ground offensive of the army by attacking the vast unprotected sea flank of the German army. The single, largest amphibious assault of the Northern Fleet was carried out in conjunction with airborne troops against German mountain troops who occupied Pechenga on the Kola Peninsula in Norway.

All naval infantry units were disbanded at the end of the war in the process as part of the general demobilization. At the beginning of the 60s, in conjunction with the new Soviet naval policy of ADM Gorshkov, the rebuilding of the Naval Infantry was started. The elite troops first made their public reappearance after the downfall of Khrushchev, who was against the navy.

Strength, Organization, and Equipment

Today, the Soviet Naval Infantry, including guard and training units, has a total strength of approximately 15,000 men. The Main Directorate of the Naval Infantry is responsible to the Commander in Chief of the Soviet Navy for training and equipment. The chief of this Directorate, who holds the rank of General, not Admiral, is one of the Deputy Commanders in Chief of the Navy. The combat element of the Navy Infantry consists of five naval infantry regiments. They operate under the direction of the Admiral Staff of the Combat Fleet, through the /369 Operation Departments of the Regional Fleets which the regiments are subordinate to. They are distributed as follows:

--The Northern Fleet	1 regiment stationed at Pechenga (Petsamo)
--The Baltic Fleet	1 regiment stationed at Baltiysk (Piliau)
--The Black Sea Fleet	1 regiment stationed at Sevastopol
--The Pacific Fleet	2 regiments stationed at Vladivostok

The Naval Infantry regiment has an approximate strength of 2,000 men and consists of:

--1 headquarters company
--1 reconnaissance company

--3 naval infantry battalions
--1 tank battalion
--1 mortar multiple-rocket launcher battery
--1 antitank company
--1 antiaircraft battery
--1 engineers company.

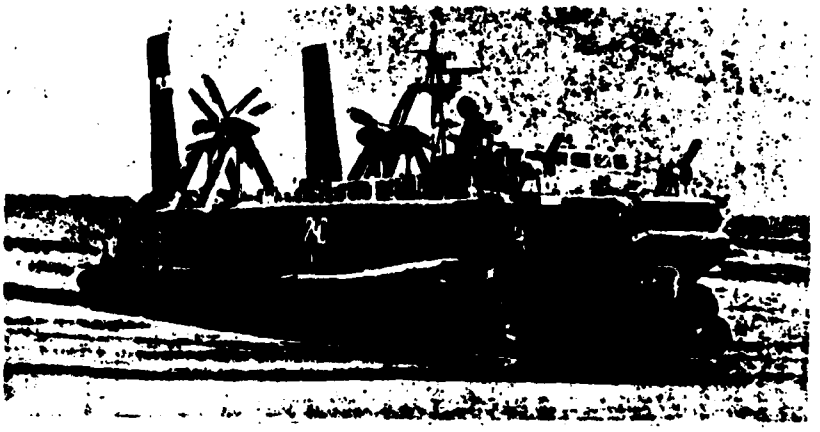


Photo No. 3: Anti-tank AT-3/SAGGER guided missile on a BRDM-2 of the Naval Infantry.
Photo No. 4: Multiple rocket launcher BM-21 of Naval Infantry in firing position.
Photo No. 5: Naval Infantry with BTR-60PB combat vehicle landing from an ACV of the AIST Class during the "Comrades in Arms" operation in 1980 on the GDR coast.
Photo No. 6: Naval Infantry with SA-9/GASKIN anti-air system after landing from landing craft. The loading of only one GASKIN container indicates that a full load would jeopardize the vehicle's center of gravity.
Photo No. 7: Large air-cushion vehicle of the AIST Class, with bow ramp half open. Note the twin 30mm AA gun mounts on the fore deck.

The approximately 75-member reconnaissance company is equipped with the PT-76 light amphibious tank and the BRDM-2 reconnaissance vehicle.

Each naval infantry battalion is organized into three infantry companies, each approximately 400 men. Each battalion is equipped with 30 amphibious assault vehicles of the BTR-60PB type. Each also has a mortar platoon armed with three 82-mm or 120-mm mortars, and an anti-tank platoon armed with portable anti-tank guided missiles of the type AT-3/SAGGER or AT-5/SPIGOT. The principal weapons of the infantry companies are the assault rifles, machine guns, RPG-7 anti-tank

rocket launchers, and the SA-7/GRAIL surface-to-air missile launcher.

The tank ballalion is organized into three light companies, each equipped with ten PT-76 tanks, and one medium company, equipped with ten T-54/55 or T-62 tanks.

The artillery component of the naval infantry regiment is a mixed battery consisting of one mortar platoon equipped with three 120-mm mortars and one rocket launcher platoon, equipped with three BM-21 multiple rocket launchers.

The anti-tank company corresponds in strength and equipment to the anti-tank company of a motorized rifle regiment. Further, it has nine mobile anti-tank guided missile systems of the type AT-3/SAGGER or AT-5/SPIGOT mounted on BRDM-2s.

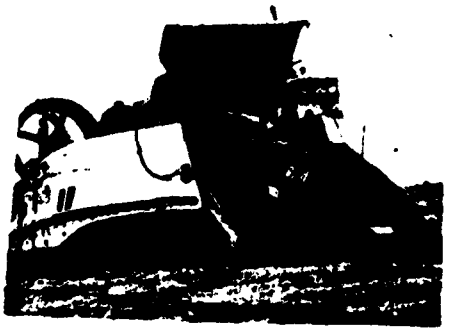
The anti-aircraft battery corresponds likewise in strength and equipment to one of a motorized rifle regiment. It consists of one AA plotoon equipped with four ZSU-23-4 anti-aircraft tanks and one AA missile platoon equipped with four SA-9/GASKIN surface-to-air missiles mounted on BRDM-2 s.

The soldiers of the engineers company are trained as combat divers in order that they can detect and clear underwater obstacles in the landing area.

Communication, NBC defense, supply, and maintenance units are organized in the approximately 150-man strong staff company of the regiment.

Methods of Employment

According to Soviet methods, the naval infantry are used either as an independent tactical amphibious landing force, or in support of an operational amphibious landing of the ground forces.



Air-cushioned vehicle of the LEBED-Class with PT-76 light tank on the bow ramp. One can see the encased engines, the commander's position on the port side, and the tarpaulin-covered gatling gun on the starboard side.

Light amphibious tanks (PT-76) disembarking from a landing ship of the ALLIGATOR-Class.

Naval infantry troops of the Baltic Red Banner Fleet disembarking from air-cushioned vehicles of the GUS-Class.

As independent tactical amphibious troops, they can perform missions such as occupying islands, harbors, naval bases, airfields in the vicinity of a coast, and perform small coastal patrols

In operational landings of the ground forces, in coastal sectors, the Naval Infantry units are used as the vanguard when the coast is fortified, but when it is unfortified, they are deployed as the first echelon and have the primary function of securing the beachhead.

When the amphibious operation has the objective of securing a harbor, the Naval Infantry is employed as the assault element.

These operations also illustrate the comparatively small strength of the Soviet Naval Infantry: whereas the U.S. Marine Corps of about 190,000 men is a separate service branch whose three Marine Amphibious Forces are each capable of conducting independent operations, the Soviet Naval Infantry is only a specially trained and selected force for employment above all as the spearhead of amphibious operations by ground forces. Unlike the U.S. Marine Corps, the Soviet Naval Infantry does not have fighter and helicopter forces but depends on air support from naval and front air forces. According to this concept, the Soviet Navy has a far greater amphibious transport capability than that required by the Naval Infantry alone.

Amphibious Transport Capabilities

The amphibious transport capabilities of the Soviet Naval Fleet consist of, in addition to small landing craft, about 90 medium and large landing ships as well as about 54 air-cushion boats. In time of war, it can obtain around 30 roll-on/roll-off ships (Ro/Ro ships) from the Soviet Merchant Fleet. However, almost all of the small and medium landing ships of the MP-Classes built during the middle fifties and early sixties have been retired. Today, the landing ship inventory of the Soviet Fleet consists of:

--55 medium landing ships of the POLNOCNY Class (from 350- to 500-t loading capacity) built at a Polish shipyard and modified repeatedly.
--13 large landing ships, of Polish production, of the ROPUCHA Class (1000-ton loading capacity).
--14 large landing ships, built in Soviet shipyards of the ALLIGATOR Class (1700-ton loading capacity).

In addition to these craft with a primary mission in marginal seas, the IVAN ROGOV Class, built since the spring of 1978, is the first new ship class with a worldwide mission. The ship has a loading capacity of about 5,000 t and can carry a complete naval infantry battalion with supporting forces. A second ship class, with floodable docking well, is reportedly in construction.

While the older MP-Class landing ships were armed with only light AA weapons for defense, the landing ships put into service since the mid Sixties are armed with bigger guns and multiple rocket launchers, with which they can hold down enemy fire during the landing. The IVAN ROGOV, besides being armed with AA guided missiles (SA-N-4), carries five helicopters as well as small ACVs.

The ACV takes on a special significance when the Naval Infantry is being employed as the spearhead of amphibious operations. This type of vehicle is particularly suited for surprise landings over natural and man-made obstacles by virtue of its high speed and troop-and equipment-carrying capabilities.

The Soviet Union experimented with ACVs before the Second World War and continued the attempt soon after the war's end. The first unarmed air cushion vehicle for patrol and transport missions was deployed in mid-1968 by the Soviet Fleet. Today, ready for employment by the Naval Infantry are:

--33 ACVs of the GUS Class (27 tons), the construction of which has begun. The unarmed, 21-m long boats can transport approximately a platoon of

Naval Infantry (approx. 25 personnel) and attain a speed of 57.5 knots (106 km/hr.).

--11 ACVs of the LEBED Class (90 tons), each equipped with a bow ramp and a six-barreled 30-mm Gatling gun. This type boat can carry a platoon of naval infantry and also at least a light tank, at a speed of 50 knots (92 km/hr).

--At least 10 large ACVs of the AIST Class (220 tons), which are reportedly being put into service at the rate of two per year. The 48-m long boats have bow and stern ramps and are armed with two 30-mm twin guns. The boat can carry a naval infantry company with their vehicles or up to five light tanks. The boat can attain a top speed of 65 knots (120 km/hr) and, according to Soviet statements, can be employed in seas of sea state 4 (wave height up to 4 meters, wind velocity of 5) with a capability of traversing breakers up to 3 meters high.

A substantial portion of the Soviet Navy's amphibious transport capability is stationed in the Baltic Sea with the Baltic Red Banner Fleet, which includes barely half of all Soviet air-cushioned boats, probably including all ten of the large AIST-Class boats and perhaps one-third, or 20, of the medium-sized POLNOCNY-Class landing ships. Further increasing the Soviet potential are 23 POLNOCNY-Class landing ships of the Polish Navy as well as ten modern FROSCH-Class landing ships that belong to the Peoples Navy of the GDR. They have a loading capacity of around 1000 tons and are equipped with guns and multiple rocket launchers.

The amphibious transport capabilities of the three Warsaw Pact Fleets in the Baltic Sea are supplied by approximately 20 to 25 Ro/Ro-ships of the Merchant Marine that are home-ported in the Baltic Sea region.

11

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Photo No. 11: Naval infantry with BTR-60-PB amphibious assault vehicles being landed from landing ships of the POLNOCNY-Class (background).

Photo No. 12: Soviet Ro/Ro-ship JURIL SMIRNOW being loaded with cars of the Schigull-type (licensed construction name of the FIAT 125). The ship can take on 500 cars of this type.

Operational Capabilities

The military amphibious transport capability of the Warsaw Pact nations stationed in the Baltic area is sufficient in strength to transport about three regiments as the first echelon of one large or three smaller amphibious operations. To that end, in addition to the Soviet Naval Infantry Regiment of the Baltic

Fleet, there is at least one regiment of the 7th Polish Amphibious Division (this division is under control of the ground forces and has a wartime strength of about 5,200) and the 20th Motorized Rifle Regiment of the 8th Motorized Rifle Division of the East German Army (the East German Navy has no naval infantry troops), ready to provide support. The latter regiment is stationed on Ruegen Island and is specially trained for amphibious operations.

The Ro-Ro ships of the merchant marines of the Soviet Union, Poland, and the GDR that are home-ported in the Baltic Sea, and other appropriate merchant capabilities of those countries, can support the landings of the three aforementioned regiments and follow them as a second echelon consisting of the remaining combat and combat support forces, each comprising a major unit of division size.

The amphibious operations should serve the strategic purpose of opening the Baltic Sea exits to the ocean for the Baltic Red Banner Fleet. For that purpose, they can execute an assault on the Danish Islands in order to establish bridgeheadson the Great Belt and on the Oresund or they can be directed against the German Baltic coast to support an attack by the Warsaw Pact ground forces through Schleswig-Holstein, into the Danish Jutland through a thrust on the sea flank. The Naval Infantry has corresponding missions with the other fleets of the Soviet Navy, as follows:

--Opening of the Bosporus and Dardanelles, so the Black Sea Fleet can operate outside its home waters.
--There will be totally free access to the Atlantic for the Northern Fleet only in the event that the Eastern focal point of the NATO surveillance and reconnaissance system--that is, the NW coast of Norway--is occupied.
--Open the exits through the Japanese Sea, namely the Korean, Tsushima, and La Perouse Straits, for the bulk of the Pacific Fleet's surface power.

To that end, at any given time, on the basis of its strength, the Naval Infantry constitutes specially trained assault forces who must be reinforced by airborne and other ground force units and supported by naval and air forces. For missions that exceed the normal spearhead functions, the strength of the Naval Infantry and the amphibious transport capabilities of the Navy are thus far hardly sufficient. But the commissioning of the IVAN ROGOV can be perceived as the Soviet preparation for amphibious operations beyond the marginal seas.